

## On Sojourn: The Role of Visual Culture When Away from Home

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Synopsis: The sojourner – cultural traveler temporarily between societies, exploring unfamiliar places – has a special relationship to the visual environment, varying with purpose and preparation. Sojourners include the tourist seeking expected visual experiences, the business traveler with a less explicitly visual agenda, the refugee forced into an unsought new environment, and the avatar in a virtual environment, among others. They record and narrate their visual experiences in a variety of ways, each with implications for teaching art. In this session, we explore conceptualizations of the sojourner and of his/her available views and narrative choices.

Three frameworks: The sojourner's experience can be described through a variety of frameworks. Here are three:

1) **John Falk** (2006) describes the **motivations of museum visitors**. We believe these attitudinal states can be applied to tourists in other settings as well: the *explorer* (generally curious), the *facilitator* (managing a group experience), the *professional and/or hobbyist* (seeking specific knowledge and interested in how it is conveyed), the *experience seeker* (collecting experiences), and the *spiritual pilgrim* (introspective). (Slides and discussion illustrate how viewing any given works of art might be different according to these perspectives, which in any case can be overlapping and alternating...we think...)

2) **Davis** (2009) organizes sojourns into three **kinds of spaces**: those that exist in the *physical world*, those that exist through *augmented reality*, and journeys within the *virtual world*. Examples of physical world narrations include postcards, souvenir items, and one's own photos; augmented reality narrations include hypermedia-supported tours, travel blogs, media portrayals, and tweeting; and virtual world narrations explore mediascapes that exist only in virtuality such as those found in video games or Second Life.

3) **Vallance** (2008), focusing on documenting physical space, distilled several conceptualizations of **landscape types** reflecting the viewer's relationship to the scene: views to *admire* (modern examples include landscapes by Poussin or Thomas Cole), views to *imagine exploring* (consider van Gogh, Hokusai, and Hockney landscapes), and views to *imagine inhabiting* (consider Hobbema, Thomas Kinkade), all also reflected in picture postcards), and identified seven categories of postcard views, discussed below. (Slides give various examples of each).

Following Cary's (2004) theory of tourism, distinguishing the lived experience from its translation through narration, this presentation focuses on the narratives of sojourners. The visual culture in each of the three sojourn spaces provides a rich space for exploring landscape types, through any of Falk's museum-visitor agendas, as well as sojourn-inspired classroom activities that play with bits and pieces of our various frameworks.

Images of place: how sojourners narrate their experience. Images of landscapes have been idealized from their first appearance as more contained backdrops to ancient Greek plays than the vastness of the real view beyond the open stage. Idealized Italian landscape painting later inspired the design of English gardens, and appealing images of place continue to shape our expectations and what we actually see. Research by The Nation Institute [Museum News1994] suggests that the preferred imagery in paintings, virtually worldwide, is a clearly-defined blue-green landscape with water, populated by clothed people.[see Komar/Melamid's interpretations]. It was not until the late 19th century that artists regularly depicted grittier images of the (largely urban) visual worlds we have created for public viewing.

a) Consuming images to narrate the physical world. A clear example of the images we consume in our travels in the form of **narration of the physical world** is picture postcards, though our own photographs may fall into similar categories. We can explore picture postcards through the categories of landscape outlined above: some depict *admirable* and *inviting* landscapes and cityscapes for the traveler who might also *fantasize about living* permanently in these previously-unfamiliar places. For the past century+, these souvenir glimpses show places at their best, with admirable terrain and suggestions of prosperity, engagement, and wonder, rarely showing bleakness unless depicting famous disasters long since overcome. Thus, like landscape paintings, they document places that are appealing in various ways, transforming a place into a commodity destination, "conjuring up promises" in

Urry's 1990 terms. The purpose and impact of picture postcards reflect the relaxation and variety-seeking motivations of voluntary sojourns inspired by sunlust, wanderlust, or an interest in the quotidian or in realism (Markwick 01 in Hunter 07). Photos of places shape sojourners' choices and expectations (Yuksel&Akgul 2007), through images of natural landscapes, cultivated landscapes, heritage and material culture, and tourism products, with or without people to suggest status and social interaction (Krippendorf 03 in Hunter 07). Tourists' photographs are "[s]ights...cut out from the continuum of the landscape", views "enhanced by and frozen into picture postcards" (Winiwarter 01). Vallance 08 framed seven kinds of images popular in postcard racks: serene countryside; dramatically-lit cities seen from a nearby distance; composite images of iconic details; images of products or symbols of a place; shaped postcards with geographic references; people doing things; satirical/humorous portrayals of place. Our own photographs, though often reflecting a more creative act, may fall into the same categories, but they may document more unexpected/serendipitous views as well – a topic for a later session, perhaps, but relevant here. (Slides explore various categories, through Falk's five motivations).

b) Augmented realities. Though collecting images in *physical* form is largely a form of consumption, many sojourners narrate in two worlds – the physical and the virtual. More interactive engagement by the sojourner creates other kinds of narratives. The internet generation's expectation for instant information, multitasking, continual contact, and creative production (Oblinger, 2008) has ushered in the **augmented reality** space of travel. Sojourners in this space might travel with adaptive hypermedia, such as the Internet on a PDA. The *augmentation of the physical world* through digital information allows the sojourner to create real-time personalized tours. For example, one can meander through a city locating information online as needed--such as discovering the name and history of a building. With camera phone in hand, sojourners can send text or email photos to family almost instantly. Online social networking sites also allow the augmented reality traveler to stay connected constantly through blogging/vlogging on personal websites, posting images on flickr, or tweeting on Twitter. As with traditional marketing materials, lay-created images shape expectations of tourists. The augmented reality narrations are faster, updated versions of past practices (postcards sent home, tour books, etc.).

c) Creating virtual realities. A significant shift in narration occurs in the third sojourn space--**the virtual world**. Digital touring requires creative production (such as making an avatar) and imagination. The virtual sojourner narrates differently because the gap that once existed between the real-time lived experience and one's narration of it has been collapsed: the experience *is* the narrative! Virtual spaces include mediascapes like Second Life and video games, which require the sojourner to rely heavily on imagination and less on the physical body.

Teaching through sojourners' eyes: The sojourner may have many points of view. She may be, in Falk's terms, an Explorer open to the unexpected, a group-leader Facilitator taking others' varying interests into account, a Professional/Hobbyist seeing Paris for the first time and taking photos to augment her lessons on Impressionism, an Experience-Seeker buying a postcard of the Eiffel Tower and checking it off her list, a Spiritual Pilgrim sitting silently in Monet's garden at Giverny. It's possible that a tourist might be all of the above at different times of a single day. It's possible that a business traveler not on a visual agenda might not clearly reflect any of these motivations but might find something memorable through some additional "accidental tourist" version of any of them. A refugee shepherding her family through a terrible place may have no time for anything but a Facilitator's use of the visual environment. And the person walking through a virtual environment is facilitating only herself and leaving no visual record at all. Each of Falk's perspectives, applied in the three "spaces" in which the sojourner travels, suggests a different use of the available visual culture. Below are some quick ideas for using sojourners' images in teaching art – we welcome your additional suggestions!

- 1) For **physical narratives**: a) Critical comparison of postcards and paintings of similar subjects: Similarities? Differences? Is one "art" and the other not? Why or why not? Imagine that both are available on the postcard rack: which would you buy, and why? Or both available for sale in a gallery? Or, given a mixed array of landscape images, which would you produce as postcards and which would you hang on a museum wall? Why?...b) Consider any published image as but a corner of a possible view of a place. What else could be going on beyond the borders? Suggest at least two possible larger scenes of which this is a "detail". Critique your alternative views and the original image: What does each depict, promote, celebrate, hide, disguise? What might be the response to tourists faced with your revised images as choices in the airport postcard racks? Why? ...c) Assume the postcard is a manipulated image (as a digital photo might well be, and as any cropped image is!): What might have been deleted from the original image, and why? What might have been added to

- enhance its appeal? How might you further change it, and what would these changes do to its message/meaning/purpose? ...d) Critique or re-interpret a sojourner's view through different ones of Falk's perspectives: How would the Experience-Seeker respond to standard and re-interpreted views of the Grand Canyon? How might the Explorer and the Spiritual Pilgrim interpret a postcard image of Machu Pichu differently?
- 2) **For augmented narratives:** a) Explore site-specific sculpture through student-created hypermedia tour. Tag places in the school and ask students to visit them with access to the Internet. While in the physical space, students search online for sculpture they think should be there. Students follow up by creating a Podcast as if the sculpture was in the space and the school was a museum, including their rationale for why it belongs. Limit the options to a particular artists' work, color-theme, or art movement. ...b) Sojourners' Museum of Fine Art (SMOFA): have students create a museum on the walls of the classroom from sojourner images (either their own or those posted on collective sites). Play around with the order of images. Do transitions matter? Should they be organized according to theme? to location? ...c) Create a Facebook page for a particular landscape image (could be Fine Art or a postcard, etc). Have students post blogs on the site as if they have traveled through the place using one of Falk's identities. What type of adventures would they have? Would they tell their friends to visit particular parts? d) Using an animation program such as Adobe Flash, have students create a stop-motion movie about a trip they have or would like to go on. ...d) Walk through a well-documented space such as the downtown of your city, with students sending at least two phone images each to parents or friends. Later print out these pix messages, and compare them to the images of that space purveyed by the Chamber of Commerce: how do the two sets vary in subject, emphasis, stories told? ...e) Walk through an easily accessible space (your school or its neighborhood) with silent students communicating with each other only through text messages. Later print/transcribe these conversations and analyze the visual images (if any) suggested by these conversations: what were students noticing and talking about? Was their focus visual, or something else?) How did the media shape their experience of the space? Or compare photo and texting explorations of the same space.
- 3) **3) For virtual narratives:** a) Allow students to become virtual world sojourners and tour guides. Give them specific worlds to explore and themes that match your classroom activities, such as: design a tour of ancient buildings in South America or critique the use of product placement in a futuristic city. ...b) Create real-world to-scale versions of favorite imaginative phenomenon in a virtual world. ...c) Supplement your art history lessons with art-themed tours in the virtual world....d) Compare your avatar's voyage to the journey s/he'd have made through the environment depicted in XYZ work of art: which of Falk's motivations might be strongest in each? What's available in one that is not possible in the other? How might your avatar's slide show to neighbors back home be different in the two cases? ...e) Create postcards to document highlights of your avatar's trip as an Explorer. From what angles? What if the avatar were an Experience-Seeker: what postcards might she collect, what photos might she take? Sketch three possibilities of each and write the identifying caption on the back...

In conclusion...: We have only briefly introduced a number of big concepts about sojourners and their visual environment. We think the implications for art-teaching goals and methods are intriguing, and we welcome your comments if and as you begin working with them in actual teaching! Please write to us (addresses on p. 1).

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